Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Passing of ITER Director-General Bernard Bigot

ST PAUL-LEZ-DURANCE, France (14 May 2022) – Dr Bernard Bigot, Director-General of the ITER Organization passed away on 14 May 2022 due to illness. An inspirational leader for more than four decades across multiple fields of science and energy, his personal dedication and commitment to ITER over the past seven years shaped every aspect of the project. While his untimely passing will be felt as a tragic blow to the global fusion community, Dr Bigot's careful design and preparation of the ITER senior management team in recent years gives reassurance of the project's continued success. His deputy, Dr Eisuke Tada—a widely respected leader in the fusion community and a seasoned veteran from ITER's earliest days—will take over leadership of the project while the ITER Council launches the search for a long-term successor to Dr Bigot.

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Dr Bigot assumed office as Director-General in March 2015 at a critical point in ITER's history. The project was experiencing significant difficulties, reflecting the managerial challenges inherent in both its complex, First-of-a-Kind engineering and its multinational approach to design, manufacturing, and construction. Multiple ITER Members were expressing their skepticism about the project's viability, with some openly questioning their continued participation. Dr Bigot accepted these challenges with humility and unwavering resolve, proposing a multifaceted action plan that would execute sweeping reforms in its decision-making, project management and—above all—project culture.

More than seven years later, ITER stands as a monumental example of scientific and engineering prowess, a unique testimony to the merits of international collaboration and a triumph of human aspiration. While still a work in progress, the ITER facility is more than 75% complete toward First Plasma. Each of ITER's Members—China, Europe, India, Japan, Korea, Russia, and the United States—has completed First-of-a-Kind components that have required unprecedented engineering innovation in multiple fields, from materials science and electromagnetism to cryogenics and robotics. In the past two years, despite the onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic, these components have steadily arrived at the ITER site, over land and sea, from three continents, each finding their place within the ITER installation. Multiple support systems are now complete and beginning commissioning. The assembly of the ITER tokamak is ongoing, a constant progression from milestone to milestone.

This dramatic realignment of the ITER project profile has been widely—and correctly—attributed to Dr Bigot's transformational leadership. As stated by Massimo Garribba, Deputy Director-General for Energy of the European Commission and current Chair of the ITER Council, "The impact of Bernard Bigot's leadership of the ITER project has been singular and without precedent; his courage, personal commitment, and sheer force of will have restored ITER to its rightful place as a hallmark of scientific and technological achievement. It reflects Dr Bigot's conviction regarding the promise of fusion energy as a safe and secure source of clean energy for future generations. We are devastated by this tragic loss, and we will honour Dr Bigot's legacy with our ongoing commitment to ITER's success."

Throughout his long and distinguished career, Dr Bigot held senior positions in research, higher education and government, including contributions to ITER and fusion for more than 20 years. Prior to his appointment at ITER, he completed two terms as Chairman and CEO of the French Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission (CEA), a government-funded technological research organization with ten research centres across France and a workforce of 16,000 focused broadly on low-carbon energies, defense and security, information technologies and health technologies. Still earlier, Dr Bigot served as France's High commissioner for Atomic Energy, an independent scientific authority that advises the French President and the French government on nuclear and renewable energy policy across many domains.

Dr Bigot was trained at the *École normale supérieure*, one of the most prestigious higher educational institutions in France and held an *agrégation* (highest-level teaching diploma in France) in physical science and a PhD in chemistry. He was a high-ranking university professor at the *École normale supérieure de Lyon*, which he helped to establish and which he directed for several years. The author of more than 70 publications in theoretical chemistry, Bernard Bigot was also in charge of research at the *École normale supérieure,* Director of the *Institut de recherche sur la catalyse* (a CNRS laboratory specializing in catalysis research) and President of the *Maison de la Chimie* foundation. In March 2022, he had been elected to the *Académie des technologies.*

In recognition of these and many other career achievements, Dr Bigot received numerous awards. These included his status as a Commander in the French Order of the Legion of Honour, a Commander in the Royal Swedish Order of the Polar Star, an Officer of the French Order of the National Merit, the holder of the Gold and Silver Star in the Japanese Order of the Rising Sun, and the recipient of the China Friendship Award.

Beyond these achievements and accolades, Dr Bigot will be remembered as a visionary leader, intensely focused on the enhancement of global society and the desire to leave the world a better place. Energy, he recognized, was fundamental to this legacy: "I've always been concerned with energy issues. Energy has long been the driver of social and economic development. Yet 80 percent of the energy consumed in the world comes from fossil fuels, and we all know that this resource will not last forever. With fusion energy, we hold in our hands the promise of a clean energy resource for millions of years. Harnessing hydrogen fusion is an opportunity we cannot miss."

Bernard Bigot was a man of duty and service, who placed loyalty above all virtues, a deeply human leader as demanding of others as he was of himself. He will be deeply missed.

BACKGROUND TO THE PRESS RELEASE

ITER—designed to demonstrate the scientific and technological feasibility of fusion power—will be the world's largest experimental fusion facility. Fusion is the process that powers the Sun and the stars: when light atomic nuclei fuse together to form heavier ones, a large amount of energy is released. Fusion research is aimed at developing a safe, abundant and environmentally responsible energy source.

ITER is also a first-of-a-kind global collaboration. Europe is contributing almost half of the costs of its construction, while the other six Members to this joint international venture (China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation and the USA), are contributing equally to the rest. The ITER Project is under construction in Saint-Paul-lez-Durance, in the south of France.

To see ITER's memorial web page, visit https://www.iter.org/bernard-bigot-memorial-page
For more information on the ITER Project, visit: http://www.iter.org/